Conservation System Guide Development
Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do the CSG's compare to current RMS contained in Sec III of the FOTG, and do they replace current RMS Guidance Documents?

   CSG's are derived from existing RMS information in the FOTG. At this time they are considered to be part of the eFOTG, but are not a replacement for existing RMS Guidance Documents.

2. There is a need to be able to print CSG's during and after development. Will there be a print option added to the data entry screen?

   - Go to Report section of Conservation System Guide web site.
   - Click View Guides/Systems
   - Choose your state and as much additional information as desired and press Search.
   - Click on the System Code or Guide Code you wish to print.
   - Click on File then Print from IE menu bar. The document will be printed on your printer.

3. All SWAPAH criteria need to be added to the matrix so land uses in addition to cropland can be entered.

   The matrix is enabled to that all quantifiable criteria can be entered for any land use. Subjective (i.e. non numeric) information cannot be entered. National technical leaders have been asked to begin looking at this issue and moving to develop quantifiable measures that can be used in this process.

4. In addition to the ability to inactivate a CSG after it is developed, there is a need to be able to delete them while they are in draft status when mistakes or fatal flaws are found.

   This is not feasible at this time due to database construction. Once a CMG has been used in another business process, it is not possible to delete the CMG, only de-activate it. De-activating a CMG will keep it from being used.

5. There needs to be a manual to help with details of data entry.

   A users guide can be accessed and downloaded from the Technology tab of My.NRCS.usda.gov

6. In addition to the resource concerns contained in the CPPE, there are program-specific concerns that need to be addressed in CSG's. States need the ability to add these as they are appropriate. (example: "salt savings" in tons used by the Colorado River Salinity Control Program)

   Currently, the national resource concern list is considered adequate to address program resource concerns. Additional program specific resource concerns are being considered by the eFOTG Resource Concern team. Please send any suggestions for additional resource concerns to Marc Safley.

7. States need a way to keep from being "timed out" while engaged in data entry.

   The system time-out was increased from 20 minutes to 30 minutes on December 10. The system is set to time-out after 30 minutes have elapsed without a transmission to or from the server. The clock can be reset manually by clicking on the reset button in the top right portion of the screen near the timer. This will keep any entered data from being lost.

8. What are the absolute minimum land uses and resource concerns that must be addressed before January 1, 2004?

   The absolute minimum would be cropland, irrigated cropland, and other land uses for which the specific resource concerns can be quantified. CSG's for systems for all land uses within the CRA can be developed as shells and data added through editing after January 1, 2004.

9. States need a way to copy CSG's entered on the training site to the actual data entry screen.

   Unfortunately, this is not possible at this time. ITC has changed the banner on the training site to clearly state that it is not a production site. Data entered is not permanently stored. Future confusion of which site a user is working with will be minimized.

10. Should progressive systems and Resource Management Systems both be added as CSG's? This appears to be redundant and could be unnecessarily work-intensive.

    RMSs should be added as CSG's. Program-specific systems can also be added.

11. When working on CSG's for land uses other than cropland for which neither irrigation nor soil erosion estimation models either do not exist or are not applicable, should those resource concerns be zeroed or deleted?

    They can be deleted and those appropriate criteria added if they are quantifiable.

12. Ephemeral gully erosion is measured in tons per acre per year. Some practices to treat them are recorded as units and not by erosion prevented. How can this be reconciled in development of a CSG to address gully stabilization?

    Practices may be recorded in units; however, their effects can be expressed in terms of the resource concerns for which they are used.

13. Where will these CSG's be stored or kept?

They will be kept on the eFOTG server at Fort Collins, Colorado. A paper copy, if necessary, may be kept in a three-ring binder in the field office, state office, or both. Until the FOTG policy is amended to fully account for eFOTG functions, the CSG's are not strictly part of the FOTG.

14. How will people (employees, partners, TSPs, and the public) access these CSG's?

    Users of enhanced ToolKit and ProTracts will have access to the CSG's in a read-only mode.

15. Terms used for CSG's need to be defined. Example: baseline, benchmark, baseline description, CSG, dates (start and end), etc.

    - Baseline Condition: this is the general tendency within any specific Common Resource Area for the resource concern.

    - Benchmark Condition: "The present condition or situation that is used as a point of reference to measure change in resource conditions resulting from conservation treatment." This connotes field-specific conditions as defined in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH 600.6-2).l

    - Common Resource Area (CRA): A geographical area where resource concerns, problems, and treatment needs are similar. Landscape conditions, soil, climate, human considerations, and other natural resource information are used to determine the geographical boundaries of the common resource area." (NPPH 600.6-3)

    - Conservation System Guide (CSG): A term developed to denote information regarding most frequently used conservation systems used within a Common Resource Area for all land uses treated. The information entered includes baseline conditions for the CRA, Resource Management Systems, practices comprising the most frequently encountered RMSs, the effects of those RMSs on resource concerns for which they are created, and the allocation in percent of the effect of the system to the practices comprising the system.

    - Effects: "The anticipated or experienced results of applying one or more conservation treatments on a planning unit in a particular resource setting. They include both on-site and off-site results of applied conservation treatments." (NPPH 600.6-5

    - Impacts: "The difference between the anticipated effects of alternative treatment in comparison to existing or benchmark condition effects." (NPPH 600.6-6)

    - Start and End Dates: These dates are used to denote when the CSG is in effect.

16. Are practices tied to a field when reported?

    Yes. ToolKit entries are the link.

17. How are the per cent effects of each conservation practice to be considered? If the CSG is based on an average field, then are the effects spread over the entire "field"? Please provide complete explanation with a complete example.

The Progress Reporting System will apply effects across the entire field when the data are mined and evaluated. For purposes of establishing an allocation of effect, many practices may have only a facilitative role (such as fence application or an access road). In these cases, the allocation should be zero with the other practices being allocated 100% of the effect on the specific resource concern. Where planning units within a CRA are complex and the CSG developers believe single-practice systems (such as Access Road) need to be treated separately, and then a CSG for them can be put in place.

18. Do you expect states to coordinate CSG's across state lines with the same effects within the same CRAs?

    Where this is possible at this time, it is encouraged. Such smoothing can be accomplished via editing following CSG's becoming functional.

19. If CSG's replace current RMSs, will the State Technical Committee need to review (especially for HEL) and will they need to be published in the federal register?

    There has been no discussion of CSG's replacing RMSs. This project is creating an automated FOTG function that will assist automated planning. Since the system contents of the CRAs have already undergone review by State Technical Committees and by other entities through publication in the Federal Register, further review is not necessary at this time.

20. Specific instructions need to be provided that separate these CSG's from the possible CSP. People seem to be confused, producing a set of CSG's that are not usable.

    Rules for the Conservation Security Program have not been released for public review. Under existing policy the Field Office Technical Guide contains program-neutral technologies; program specific technical issues are released in program-specific documents. The CSG activity will allow States to create Guides for program-specific needs (e.g. the Colorado River Salinity Control Program).

21. A readily available employee/partner CRA/CSG site is needed to provide info, updates, and heads-up messages.

    CSG materials including the User Guide is available on the Technology tab of My.NRCS.usda.gov ITC releases News Flashes regularly to the State IT Coordinators, and Phil Smith has established an SRC-focused list for direct email to State CSG leaders. Each Wednesday afternoon through mid-January (with exception of the peak holiday period) a teleconference is scheduled to address questions and concerns.

22. A good explanation of how to use and determine baseline conditions in the CRA, along with examples, will be very valuable to the field. It will also make a huge difference in potential effects of conservation practices applied, and has the potential to have far-reaching consequences for the agency.

23. The current time-line is not adequate for states to complete a quality job, even if considering only the required three resource concerns.

    We understand that the schedule with deadline is daunting. We are working to make it less so.